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MEMORIAL ADDRESS

ON THE

LIFE, CHARACTER AND PUBLIC SERVICES

OF

DAVID L. PHILLIPS,

DELIVERED BEFORE THE ILLINOIS STATE PRESS ASSOCIATION, AT ITS FIFTH WINTER MEETING, HELD AT SPRINGFIELD, ILLINOIS, FEBRUARY 16, 1881.

BY PAUL SELBY,

EDITOR ILLINOIS STATE JOURNAL.

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MEMORIAL ADDRESS.

Mr. President and Members of the Illinois Press Association:

It was a warm sultry morning on the 19th day of June last, when, at a few minutes before six o'clock, one of the ablest, most honored and influential members of your Association breathed his last at his home near this city. The last few months of his life had been full of suffering, the result of internal injury sustained in his early manhood, and as the clouds which had partially obscured the morning sky were dispelled by the rays of the sun as it rose above the horizon, the calmness and quiet that pervaded all nature appeared emblematic of the peaceful rest of him whose troubled life had just closed.

> "Men drop so fast, ere life's mid stage we tread,
> Few know so many friends alive as dead."

By your invitation I come to-night to lay before you some "Memorial of the Life, Character and Public Services" of our common friend, brother and co-worker in the field of journalism, the late DAVID L. PHILLIPS, for sixteen years joint proprietor and editor of the *Illinois State Journal*. The limited time necessarily allotted to me for this purpose, will only enable me to note briefly the more important incidents in his history and his more prominent personal characteristics.

The family to which Mr. Phillips belonged was of Welsh origin, his grandfather on the paternal side having emigrated from Wales previous to the Revolutionary War. Of three brothers who came over together, one settled in Massachusetts and has descendants still living in the vicinity of Boston and Salem. Another penetrated into the Far West, and, the family traditions say, died in or about Cincinnati leaving no issue. The third found a home in Virginia, and from this branch of the parent-stock the Phillips family of Illinois are descended. John Phillips, its head, was born in Virginia in 1789, remaining there until he had reached his majority, when he went on a visit to a relative at Chillicothe, one of the earliest settlements of Ohio. The war of 1812 was at that time in progress, and the young Virginian joined in an expedition to reinforce the ingrate Hull, being chosen to a Lieutenancy. The war over, he went to Tennessee, thence to Kentucky, and finally, about the year 1816, to what

was then the Territory of Illinois, settling in the vicinity of Marion, then in Franklin county, but now the county-seat of Williamson county. Here he met and finally married Leannah Tippee, who was born in the vicinity of Nashville, Tenn., but whose parents emigrated to Illinois early in her childhood.

David L. was the fourth son of this marriage, born where the town of Marion now stands, October 28, 1823. There were thirteen children in all—eight sons and five daughters—of whom four sons and all the daughters survive. In 1829 the family removed to St. Clair county, settling at first a few miles east of Belleville, and, although their home was changed once or twice, they continued to reside in St. Clair county, where the younger members of the family were born. The father (John Phillips) died there August 14, 1847, but the mother survived until October 14, 1875, dying at the age of 78 years.

In common with the mass of young men of that time, the subject of this sketch had only those opportunities of education afforded by the common schools of the period, which were none of the best; but gifted with an active mind and a strong thirst for knowledge, he made such good use of them by study during the winter, while laboring on the farm during the summer, that by the time he had attained to manhood, he was fitted to teach, and acquitted himself with credit in that profession for several years. About that time the learned and able Dr. John M. Peck, the distinguished pioneer teacher and preacher of the Baptist denomination, was in the very prime of his manhood and usefulness, and from the seminary which he founded at Rock Spring, was exerting a vast influence upon the young men of the State, and even in other States. It was no doubt due to the direct influence of this able and gifted man, that at the age of 18 years, young Phillips was received into the Baptist church, and some two years later entered the ministry of that denomination with all the zeal and fervor peculiar to his youth and sanguine temperament. He remained in this profession probably eight years, teaching and preaching at intervals in St. Clair, Washington, Union, and perhaps other counties in Southern Illinois. In the early part of his career as a minister, he was married to Miss Charlotte Tate, of St. Clair county, who still survives him, and the young couple began life together at Elkton, in Washington county. Mr. Phillips possessed elements which made him a popular pulpit orator, and it is not too much to say that his zeal, earnestness and enthusiasm had attracted attention to him widely in that section of the State. This finally resulted in his being called to take charge of the Baptist church at Jonesboro, where he acquitted himself with his usual ability.

During his residence there the attention of advanced thinkers all over the country began to be attracted to the encroachments of slavery and

the efforts of its adherents to control the politics of the nation. Mr. Phillips, though a Democrat in politics, announced his opposition to the institution, and the majority of his church, holding different views on that subject, withdrew their support. About this time the Illinois Central Railroad Company were constructing their road through the State, and perceiving the abilities of the pulpitless young clergyman, offered him the position of paymaster in the construction department, which he accepted. He was subsequently transferred to the position of Land Agent of the Company, for their southern section, which he continued to fill, I believe, until the road was completed. During his connection with the Illinois Central, his duties led him to visit different parts of the State from one end of the line to the other, and he then laid the foundation of that extensive knowledge of individuals which, aided by a remarkably retentive memory, made him the personal acquaintance of more prominent men than almost any other man in the State.

About 1854, having withdrawn from the charge of the church at Jonesboro under the circumstances narrated, Mr. Phillips became associated with the management of the Jonesboro *Gazette*, then, as it is now, a Democratic paper. At that time the controversy over the "Kansas-Nebraska Bill," removing the restriction against the introduction of slavery north of the parallel of 36° 30'—known as the "Missouri Compromise,"—was at its height, and it was inevitable that a man of Phillips' temperament and impulses should be drawn into its discussion, and equally inevitable that he should take ground against it. Into this contest he entered with all the fervor of an ardent, zealous nature. As a result he soon found himself arrayed against his party as he had previously been against his church. His partner withdrew and, for a time, the *Gazette* dispensed to its readers the most radical Republican doctrine, although the Republican party had not then been organized.

It was at this time my attention was first attracted to the young anti-slavery journalist of Southern Illinois. Being then in charge of the *Journal* at Jacksonville, and in full sympathy with him on this question, I remember well the impression that was made upon my mind by the powerful articles in defense of the sanctity of national compacts and in vindication of human rights which those two gallant champions of radical Democracy gave forth—Phillips, of the Jonesboro *Gazette*, in the South, and Dr. C. H. Ray, of the Galena *Jeffersonian*, in the North. Occupying precisely similar positions politically, they were strikingly similar in their modes of thought, close logic and vigorous style of discussion. They were, so to speak, the out-posts, the advance guards of the party then just marshaling for the conflict, and exercised a most potent influence in its organization. I speak of this in no partisan sense and with no purpose to appeal to party spirit, but simply as the truth of history.

It was about this time that I met Mr. Phillips for the first time. This was at a Convention of Anti-Nebraska Editors of the State, held at Decatur, February 22, 1856, alluded to in an address on "A Quarter of a Century of Journalism," which I had the privilege of delivering before this Association, two years ago. In this Convention, participated in by less than a score of Illinois journalists, the preliminary steps in the organization of the Republican party of Illinois were taken, and by it the first State Convention, which met at Bloomington in May following, was proposed. Phillips was present at the Decatur meeting in full sympathy with its purposes and objects, and being recognized as the representative leader of the new party in Southern Illinois, he was made a member of the State Executive Committee. When the Convention met he represented his county in that body, was made the Vice-President for his District, and also represented the party as candidate for Presidential Elector on the Fremont ticket. Two years later (1858) he led the "forlorn hope" of the party as candidate for Congress in opposition to Hon. John A. Logan, and though defeated by an overwhelming vote, he demonstrated his ability upon the "stump" in such a manner as to attract to himself the attention of the whole State, as he had previously done by his advocacy of Republican principles through the press. In 1860 he was again a member of the State Convention, and was made a delegate to the National Convention at Chicago which nominated Abraham Lincoln for the Presidency, bearing his full part in the events of that historical period.

One of the earliest acts of Mr. Lincoln, after his accession to the Presidency, was to recognize the merits of the courageous leader of the party in Southern Illinois, by his appointment to the position of Marshal for the Southern District, to which he was reappointed in 1865, and which he continued to hold until Andrew Johnson's defection in 1866. The administration of this office during the dark and troublous period of the war, brought Mr. Phillips in close and intimate relations with the most trusted and confidential agents of the Government, and imposed upon him many delicate and responsible duties, in the discharge of which he was not found wanting in either ability, courage or integrity.

It was in the darkest period of the war—at the close of the year 1862, after the defeats of McClellan before Richmond, when Grant and Sherman were being baffled in their attempted advance towards Vicksburg, and when thousands were contemplating the experiment of emancipation of four million of slaves with gloomy forebodings—that Mr. Phillips became associated with the proprietorship of the STATE JOURNAL, taking the place of Major W. H. Bailhache, who had been appointed a Quartermaster and gone into the field. My own connection with the editorial department of the paper had commenced in July preceding, and it continued without interruption to near the close of 1865. In that time it was my

fortune to meet Mr. Phillips almost daily and on the most confidential terms. In the JOURNAL of December 8, 1862, announcing his accession to the paper, he said:

"I am a cordial supporter of the present administration—as I would be of any other in this hour of trial and peril—and am in favor of employing all the means known to the Constitution and laws to suppress, effectually and forever, the existing rebellion against the Government.

"In the prosecution of the war, I recognize no distinction between Democrats and Republicans in arms against the assassins who are attempting to destroy the heritage bequeathed to us by our fathers, and seal up in endless night all hopes of human progress and human liberty. The meed of praise will be given alike to men of all parties who peril their lives for the preservation of that Government which we hold as a common trust to posterity. I am a Republican, yet I pledge myself to no stereotyped line of policy. The future is too dark and uncertain to define, with any degree of certainty, a political course to be pursued by any true lover of his country, other than so far as I have already indicated. * * *

"I take my position without malice towards any member of my species, and fondly hope that my relations with those from whom I differ politically, may be personally kind, courteous and forbearing, leaving the stern weapons of truth, reason and logic to determine the questions at issue between us.

"It should be the highest aim of the journalist, while he remains as true to his country as the eternal laws of gravitation, or the career of the sun to his course, never yielding to error or submitting to wrong, to write nothing which he, in after years, would blot out, or which would needlessly wound the most sensitive. To pour oil upon the troubled waters of his country; to cement instead of alienate; to conserve rather than to destroy; to build up, and not tear down, should be the end and ambition of all."

These patriotic and noble sentiments will now be approved by all, regardless of distinctions of party. They express views of the duty of the journalist which indicate his high estimate of the responsibilities of that profession upon which their author was just entering.

But I must not omit to speak somewhat more fully of Mr. Phillips' public service and political life. That he rendered valiant and valuable aid to the Government in a position of great difficulty and responsibility, was conceded in his reappointment by President Johnson in 1865, in accordance with the well-known wishes and intention of his martyred predecessor. But he went still further, and was largely instrumental in raising and equipping the 109th Regiment Illinois Volunteers—sometimes called the Phillips Regiment—which was organized at Jonesboro, to a large extent being composed of the sons of his former neighbors and their friends. The fact that the record of this regiment was stained by treachery reflected no dishonor upon him, but upon their teachers and leaders, who had imbued many of its members with unpatriotic sentiments.

In the fall of 1875, with a view to benefitting the health of his son, then rapidly failing under the inroads of consumption, Mr. Phillips made a visit to California, spending some seven months in that region. He bore

with him a commission as a Special Agent of the Treasury Department, empowering him to inquire into the management of Custom Houses and Internal Revenue offices in that section of the Union; and the manner in which he discharged that duty won the warm thanks of the Department, and placed it in a position to secure important reforms in the public service. During his stay on the Pacific Coast he wrote a series of letters to the *Journal* descriptive of places visited, scenery, climate, customs, public works, etc., which were subsequently issued in book form, and which impart a more vivid and comprehensive idea of that interesting region than can be obtained from almost any other source. My space will not permit me to quote at any considerable length from these letters, but extracts might be presented showing that their author was as much in advance of public sentiment on some of the social and industrial questions now exciting discussion on the Pacific Coast and elsewhere, as he was when battling against slavery twenty years before. The following extract from a letter bearing date January 1, 1876, has a touching significance, which, in view of his recent death, will justify a quotation:

"Since my last letter was finished, another year has been numbered with the unreturning Past. Its joys and sorrows, its successes and failures, its lights and shadows, are all garnered in the storehouse of Eternity. Each of my readers and the writer of these Pacific Coast Letters stand another year nearer the portals of the Unknown. But, through the infinite goodness, mercy and wisdom of God, while our steps may be sobered and our gray hairs increased, we are permitted to look outward and onward to the end, stimulated by hope and unawed by fear; standing in the right as it is given us to see it, and rejoicing in the evening glories of the nineteenth century. Renewing my faith in the Fatherhood of God and the Brotherhood of Man, from the shores of the Pacific I send to my readers and the tens of thousands of good friends and loved ones of and about whom my thoughts are busy today, my ardent, earnest wishes for a Happy New Year for them and theirs."

And this from one of the closing paragraphs of his last letter:

"To the greetings of our friends and for the cordial welcome back to the place of our appointed labor, for the words of sympathy and kindly regret in our failure to secure returning health for a son soon to pass away, we can only say, repressing almost uncontrollable emotion, we thank you, and may God bless you all!"

And, now, the writer of these pathetic words has himself passed through the "portals of the Unknown." All Hail, and Farewell!

This visit, though temporarily beneficial to the invalid, conferred no permanent benefit, and a few months after his return, he died—his death being a source of great sorrow to Mr. Phillips, as the loss of a favorite daughter had been a few years before.

Previous to 1871 Mr. Phillips devoted some two or three years to the construction of the Belleville & Southern Illinois Railroad, acting as President of the Company and evincing a practical business talent and

sagacity of a high order. His practical knowledge of railroad matters was surpassed by few who had not made that department of business a life-long study.

In the fall of 1876, Mr. Phillips received the Republican nomination for Congress in this District, and the canvass which he conducted—though unsuccessful in the face of an overwhelming adverse majority—is generally conceded to have been one of the ablest ever made by a candidate for Congressional honors in the State. His appointment to the position of Postmaster in the following year, by President Hayes, was a fitting recognition of public services and sacrifices.

With the exception of about two years between the close of 1865 and the early part of 1868, up to his retirement from the *Journal* in 1878, it was my fortune to be associated with Mr. Phillips almost continuously. The opportunity I thus had of knowing our brother journalist has, I think, given me the right, as well as the ability, to speak of him as a man, as a journalist, as a politician, and as a public officer. In all that period, our friendly relations were never interrupted for a moment. It was necessary that, in such a relation, there should be mutual trusts and confidences; in these he was never found wanting. Whatever may have been his imperfections—and he was a man, and no man is perfect—he was as true in his journalistic relations to those associated with him as he was patriotic in his political relations, and honest and faithful in the discharge of his official duties.

Mr. Phillips was essentially a self-educated, self-made man. While, with the majority of the youth of his day, he possessed few advantages in early life, he distanced the great mass of his associates in the progress which he made and the results he achieved. He was entitled to all the more credit for what he accomplished, though his achievements were necessarily unequal. He possessed natural qualities of intellect which fitted him for wide and profound research. His official duties during most of the period when he was associated with the public press, did not permit him to engage in general journalism for any considerable length of time. His tastes led him rather into special fields. In these he was full, strong, comprehensive and exhaustive. Inclined to the discursive and florid in style, a strong and vivid imagination still enabled him to clothe his thoughts in a garb which never failed to command the attention of the reader, whether the latter agreed with him or not. He was never dull or prosaic—never wrote common-place merely to fill up the page, but his utterances came from a mind overflowing with living facts and arguments. Gifted with a memory that surprised those who knew him by its extraordinary sweep and tenacity, his mind was the repository of an amount of knowledge of men and things, gained from reading and observation,

possessed by few men of his time. I doubt whether his acquaintance with public men and facts in current history was surpassed by any man in the State.

I have not sought to speak of our dead friend and former co-worker in the field of journalism in the language of mere eulogy, but in that of history and of fact. I should else do dishonor to his memory. And as we, as an Association, reverently and affectionately lay this feeble and imperfect tribute upon his tomb, let us do it with the feeling that—

> "Faith builds a bridge across the gulf of death,
> To break the shock blind nature cannot shun,
> And land thought safely on the farther shore."

In conclusion, I desire to submit to this Association the resolutions adopted by the members of the press of this city, on occasion of the death of Mr. Phillips, and I will thank the Secretary to read them.

RESOLUTIONS:

Adopted at a Meeting of Members of the Press of the city of Springfield, held at the *Illinois State Register* office, Saturday Evening, June 19, 1880, to take into consideration the death of Col. D. L. Phillips :

WHEREAS, Death has taken from among us the Hon. D. L. Phillips, for many years most prominently and influentially identified with the Press of this city; Therefore,

Resolved, That, in the death of Mr. Phillips, the profession to which he recently belonged has lost one of its ablest and most honorable members; that the city and State have lost a high-minded and public-spirited citizen, and we an honored and valued friend.

Resolved, That those who knew Mr. Phillips most intimately had the highest appreciation of his worth as a man and his ability as a journalist; that, as a friend, he was always true, earnest and faithful; as an opponent, manly, generous and forgiving; as a public officer, honest and trust-worthy.

Resolved, That while we tender to his bereaved family our kindest and most cordial sympathy, we congratulate them on the enduring monument he has reared by a life of activity and usefulness.

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